

They have been on the floor this morning. They were yesterday, and I was listening to some of them on both sides and appreciating the eloquence and vigor with which they argued.

But I am at the point where I have to ask myself, what difference do those arguments really make in the face of the brute reality that every day thousands of kids in the District of Columbia get up and go to school where their parents and they know they are not safe, they will not learn, and it is not going to change? That is the position real people are in every day. They do not have any other options. That is the reality.

I think of this more and more from the standpoint of the parents, because I have talked to a lot of them over the years. I have three kids. They are 13 and 11 and 7. You will not be surprised to find out that my wife and I spend a lot of time talking about the education of these kids, trying to make the same decisions parents all over the country have to make about education: Which first grade teacher would be better for the 7-year-old? We spend a lot of time talking about that one. What kind of electives should the 7th grader take, now that he can finally take electives? Should he be in the public presentation class or Spanish or what? We talk about this, and these decisions are very important to our kids. These kinds of decisions for our kids might make a difference in terms of how far they go in life. It might make a difference in terms of how successful they are in life, so we spend an awful lot of time on it.

But I am going to tell you these parents I talk to about this issue, they are not making those kinds of decisions. Those are not the kinds of things they are debating. When I talk to them, there is a sense of urgency and sometimes a sense of panic in their eyes because they know a lot more is at stake than which teacher their kid is going to get in first grade. They know what is at stake for their kids may be not how successful they are in life or how far they go in life but whether they have a real shot at it at all. This is the difference between a good education and not a good education when you are trying to raise kids on your own in these neighborhoods and you don't have any help from anybody else anyway. That is why they feel this sense of panic, because they are looking at their kids and they know, if something is not done quickly—and it is not going to be done in the traditional system—if something is not done quickly for their kids, they are looking at kids who, if they are trapped in that school for their whole educational career, are a whole lot more likely to end up by the time they are 25 years old in a gang or on drugs or in jail or wounded or maybe dead. That is what these parents are thinking. That is why this bill is important to them.

We ought to give them a chance. That is for all they are asking. They

have been looking for this kind of relief for years. The House has voted it for years. The Senate has voted on it. The idea that this is something new this President has presented is just not correct. There are a bunch of us who have been involved in it one way or another for a whole lot of years. Now we actually have a chance to pass it. Now we have a chance to give these parents and their kids some options, and we just ought to do it.

The upside for these families is tremendous. The downside is just not that great. If it doesn't offer them a better education, they will not take advantage of these scholarships and the money will revert—I guess to the District of Columbia. Or does it revert to the Treasury? To the District of Columbia.

OK, the arguments against it. I guess the argument—I had not heard this but I suppose it could happen—the District of Columbia voted against vouchers 20 years ago. It was 20 years ago.

The argument I hear a lot, that opportunity scholarships or school choice will hurt the public schools.

This is kind of ironic and I have discussed this with parents. Of course, everybody else in the country, except these, usually, single moms in these neighborhoods, has school choice. Talk to somebody in the realtor business if you do not believe that. When people buy a house someplace what do they ask about? They ask about the schools, don't they? Because, for the average person in this country, if your school is a school where you think your kid is missing out, it is not a marginal question. If that school is really failing your kid, for whatever reason, you are going to do one of three things. You are going to move, you are going to put your kid in a private school or a different school of some kind, or—and this is an increasing number of people—you are home schooling your kids. You are going to do something.

But these moms can't do that because they don't have the money to move, they don't have the money to put their kids in a private school, and they are working, so they don't have the time to stay home and home school. So they are stuck.

Everybody else in the country has this kind of opportunity and that has not hurt the public schools. This is a country that believes in, and is enriched by, diversity, by people having different opportunities and different choices. Everybody has it except them. They think that argument is quite ironic.

The argument against this, that it will cost the public schools money—Mr. President, do words have meaning? It gives the public schools more money, \$13 million more than they would otherwise get. If the scholarships don't work, they will get more. The \$13 million will revert to the Treasury and we can give that to them as well.

I have already gone over the argument that it was foisted on the Mayor.

It wasn't. Boy, if it is, he is doing a pretty good job dealing with something that was foisted on him. I saw him down here in the Senate the other day.

I don't like to burden the Senate too much with my speeches. It is only when I have dealt with something for a while where I feel strongly about something. I do about this issue. I appreciate the opportunity to talk and I appreciate the passion and the sincerity of those who oppose this.

I would like to reach out and say to folks, let's try this year. I think it is going to work. These parents think it is going to work. We had 10,000 people line up in 1997 for 1,000 part-time scholarships. Let's give these kids a chance. I think we will be glad we did, if we will vote this in.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there now begin a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 1657

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I understand S. 1657 is at the desk and is due for a second reading.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. That is correct.

Mr. STEVENS. I ask we proceed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1657) to amend section 44921 of title 49, United States Code, to provide for the arming of cargo pilots against terrorism.

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, on behalf of the leader, I object to further proceeding on this measure so it can go to the calendar.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the rule, the bill will be placed on the calendar.

SCHEDULED MARKUP OF THE EMERGENCY SUPPLEMENTAL

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I am here this morning to announce that we will have a markup of the supplemental request presented by the President, the emergency supplemental request for Iraq, on Tuesday morning at 10 a.m. I wish to state some of the reasons that I have scheduled this hearing.

Secretary Rumsfeld appeared before our committee and made several statements. I want to repeat a few quotes from his statement to our committee. He said:

Standing between our people and the gathering dangers is the courage of our men and women in uniform.